Fair Trade:

Making Room for Feminized, Non-Commercial Exchange

in Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda*

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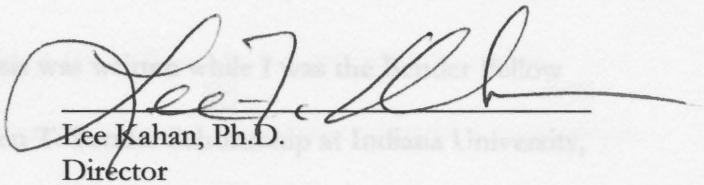

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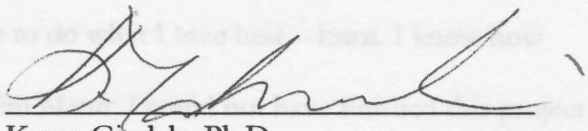

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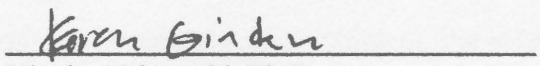

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As global trade developed throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, exotic goods from all corners of the globe made their way into the English market. Many of these objects were exorbitantly expensive, and the upper classes vied to own them; subsequently, their trade contributed to the rising wealth of the merchant class. Although some conservative Englishmen repudiated the mania for exotic items as a rejection of natural British goods, in the age of British imperial expansion any abnegation of international trade was just impractical. Although changing tastes that elevated imports over native products meant that British manufacturers and tradesmen faced stiffer domestic competition and a threat to their livelihoods, the British colonial system opened up new markets for British goods (Colley 95-98). One of these new markets was the female one, and merchants earnestly courted women by inserting their goods into the homes of royalty and other tastemakers and by creating a system that focused on commodity fetishism. One tool that was available to merchants both intentionally and incidentally was popular culture like newspapers, ladies' magazines, and novels.

Maria Edgeworth's 1801 domestic novel, *Belinda,* is particularly rich in its use of imported exotics and their exchange, and it consciously positions itself in a discourse regarding British trade. If, as Laura Brown asserts, "literature is significantly implicated with history" then it can reveal current attitudes about any number of things (*Ends* 4). Published before industrialization, however, *Belinda* does not reflect a world whose modes of production or economy are of the type upon which Karl Marx focused the majority of his theories, so a Marxist analysis of *Belinda* is not useful. Instead, socio-cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, in his introduction to *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, gives us an alternative tool for examining both the movement of goods in *Belinda* and the value they possess by suggesting that we focus "on the things that are exchanged,

rather than simply on the forms or functions of exchange" (3). These "things" that we exchange are political—and complicated—as are the words we use to talk about them. Since most of the commodities I will discuss in this paper weren't originally intended for the market, Appadurai's use of the term "things" is useful. To him, "things" are objects that move from person to person either through sale, barter, trade, or gifting; most importantly these "things" don't have to have been produced for the market. Because the word "things" removes the connotations inherent in words like "goods," "objects," "items," or "luxuries," using it opens up the conversation about exchange. I will use Appadurai's "things" when discussing the New World flora and fauna that were appropriated and used as markers of wealth by English aristocrats and thus metamorphosed into market items (16). However, *Belinda* makes it a point to repudiate the commodification of nature. Natural goods are not objectified in the novel and their commodification is rejected as well. Working against the portrayal of both women and exotic luxuries as shown in many other texts, *Belinda* portrays both as performing roles other than display. In this novel, foreign things—like women—can be useful and educational, and their exchange can be generous and resist the embedded implication of contractual reciprocity.

Inasmuch as *Belinda* involves issues of gender, economy, environment, education and colonialism, my task in this paper is an unwieldy one. As Laura Brown has discussed in her book *Ends of Empire*, no one theoretical approach provides a sufficient framework for an investigation of this sort (5-9), thus I will follow her revisionist lead. In that study of the way the aims of Empire manifested themselves in literature from 1688-1730, Brown states that her work's critical aim is "to reorient the project of eighteenth-century literary studies toward an integrated account of categories of oppression so that the examination of this field can promote the ends of a feminist, anti-imperialist, anti-racist, libertarian politics" (11). Her

project there, as my own paper hopes to be, is not methodological but theoretical and political.

Belinda's representational aspects provide an avenue into a sort of anthropological study of the English people at the end of the long eighteenth century. Although "modern novel criticism exaggerates the [novel's] autonomy prior to the nineteenth century and privileges its distinctly fictional elements over its representational ones" (Butler 479), *Belinda* contains detailed descriptions of late-eighteenth-century social systems. Marilyn Butler has already shown this in her article "The Purple Turban and the Flowering Aloe," which charts the representations of gift exchange in *Belinda.* Sociological or anthropological examinations of *Belinda* can allow us to observe the interactions of multiple social systems as represented in fiction. An anthropologist would call this approach to observe and explain society "processual" inasmuch as it "attempts to isolate and study the different processes at work within society:" these relations include "relations with the environment,...the economy,...social relations within the society,...[and] the impact which the prevailing ideology and belief system have on these things" (Renfrew and Bahn 448). These processes overlap within the realm of human behavior, thus representations of human behavior in fiction provide representations of the actions caused by these processes. Butler makes the case that *Belinda* lends itself to this sort of criticism because Edgeworth and her contemporary, Jane Austen, were interested in proto-anthropological books and travelogues, and thus approached their fiction with something akin to an ethnographer's eye: "...there is surely something remarkable," Butler writes, "in the move of these two novelists around 1800 to isolate middle- to upper-class leisured society and, moreover, to introduce not only innovatory and nuanced strategies for observing interpersonal behavior but an equally new insight into the systematic implications of social practices" (482). Through its contrasting

plot episodes, *Belinda* repeatedly fluctuates between representations of different modes of structuring self, home, and society, and concludes that some ways work and some ways do not.

This paper is most concerned with *Belinda's* comments on economics, exotic goods, women, and the movement of things through society. Concentrating on the early eighteenth century, Brown notes that "the female figure, through its simultaneous connections with commodification and trade on one hand, and violence and deference on the other, plays a central role in the constitution of this mercantile capitalist ideology" (3). To investigate the way *Belinda* pushes back against the feminization of capitalism and coopts the circulation of goods for aims that are non-imperialist, I will focus on the "things" themselves; this, Appadurai feels, "makes it possible to argue that what creates the link between exchange and value is *politics,* construed broadly" (3). And politics really is what drives *Belinda.* The novel is a richly nuanced examination of European trade practices that attempts to deconstruct eighteenth-century ideology about the "naturalness" of trade and relocate exotic trade items into a non-violent, moral, and feminized sphere. *Belinda's* female exchanges of exotic goods criticize British colonialism and suggest an alternative to masculine colonial relations. At a time when the imperialist project that enabled the consumption of luxuries was often blamed on the "female desire" for exotics (Koerner 243; Brown *Ends* 14), Edgeworth's novel seems to offer women an alternative way to engage in colonialism without exploiting consumer goods and the people through which such goods are obtained.

Women and the Naturalization of Trade

Trade and its implementation were a concern not only for merchants, but also for a slew of eighteenth-century commentators, including Adam Smith who published his *Inquiry into the Wealth of Nations* in 1776. Throughout the 1700s all sorts of writers discussed trade

overtly and covertly in a myriad of texts. In imagination and in actuality, their recursive and self-referential dialogue traversed the globe and produced travelogues, ethnographies, essays, poems and novels. In his important work on discourse analysis, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Michael Foucault offers this famous observation:

> The frontiers of a book are never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first lines, and the last full stop, beyond its internal configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network. And this network of references is not the same in the case of a mathematical treatise, a textual commentary, a historical account, and an episode in a novel cycle; the unity of the book, even in the sense of a group of relations, cannot be regarded as identical in each case. The book is not simply the object that one holds in one's hands; and it cannot remain within the little parallelepiped that contains it: its unity is variable and relative. As soon as one questions that unity, it loses its self-evidence; it indicates itself, constructs itself, only on the basis of a complex field of discourse. (23)

Belinda is a true node in the Foucauldian sense: it indicates itself as part of a larger discourse, as, among other things, it engages with works of literature, with treatises on education and curricula, with texts on various fields of scientific inquiry, and with books about economics and trade. To understand the book's intervention, it is therefore necessary to trace the contours of this discourse.

In addition to advertising themselves advantageously in the media, merchants and those who supported their enterprises worked to naturalize their imported goods throughout English society. Appadurai gives us a useful tool for defining this process of naturalization: distinguishing between types of commodities, he calls those goods that are produced for the

market "commodities by *destination,*" since their destination has always been the market; but those goods that are not originally destined for the commercial market, he calls "commodities by *metamorphosis,*" since they are transformed into commercial goods through some phenomenon of fashion (16). In Europe, a deep interest in anything foreign developed, first during the Age of Discovery and later during colonization. "Things" that both naturalists and consumers desired were the flora and fauna of the Far East and the New World, thus natural objects and living things were metamorphosed into commodities. A very early exotic import that was commodified was the coconut. Brought back to Europe because of its strange and wondrous nature, coconut shells were as valuable as pearls or gems (Bailey) and were used for, among other things, the bowls of toasting cups (see fig. 1).[1] The rarity of exotic items like the coconut drove up their cost and put them out of the reach of most Englishmen, but images of them in paintings and prints made the exotic accessible to a large population and served the goals of merchants who aimed to put their wares into wider circulation. Such images not only reflect merchants' success in creating fads and fashions out of import items but also contribute to the naturalization of the exotic. For example, Bogdani's early eighteenth-century painting, *Farm birds with a macaw and a tom-tit in a tree*, depicts macaws and other parrot species flying freely about the English countryside and mingling with native poultry as if they belonged there (see fig. 2). But of course macaws do

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[1] According to Edward Wenham, an expert on the history of toasting cups (also called "standing cups"), the earliest mention of a coconut toasting cup comes from a will dated 1259 which listed the cup as "cyphum de nuce Indye cum pede apparatu argente." These cups feature "coconut bowls mounted in silver or silver-gilt and raised on a stem and foot," and are sometimes listed in wills as "note argento" or "blak nutte." Early examples of these cups are extremely rare, but by the late 15th and early 16th centuries they "seem to have been popular" (Wenham). Information about one coconut cup in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago points out that this popularity might have been due to the fact that "John Parkinson's *Theatrum Botanicum* (1640)…credits wine drunk from a coconut with curing colic, epilepsy, and rheumatoid disorders." Even though many examples of coconut cups exist, due to their expense, they were inaccessible to most Europeans (Bailey).

not belong there, and rare birds species were luxury items of the highest order (see figs. 3, 4 and 7). Images like Bogdani's, which present a recombinant environment that unites instead of divides the world, reveal the beginnings of the British imperial ethos. Over time, as exotics became more commonplace, pets such as birds became fashionable throughout the elite and bourgeoisie classes. The English enjoyed all types of birds from the New World, and the "variety of birds for sale constantly expanded, and novelties were eagerly sought. Parrots and cockatoos, the pets of the aristocracy of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries…adorned the parlours of shopkeepers and artisans" in the eighteenth century (J. H. Plumb qtd. in Brown *Fables* 232). To meet the demand, birdseller's shops such as the one Edgeworth portrays in *Belinda* sold a multitude of birds that came off of ships from the colonies (see fig. 5). By transforming the exotic into the quotidian, the British exerted control over their growing empire and reduced English fear of new, often unknown, colonial spaces.

This discourse of naturalization also served the political interests of the merchant class by helping it depict itself as a group of patriots who supported, rather than undermined, the domestic economy. To publicly showcase their fealty, merchants often joined patriot societies. In her book *The Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837,* Linda Colley notes that these societies ensured the fame of their members by "advertising their meetings widely in the press and by issuing a list of subscribers" (97). It was the goal of these societies to sponsor patriotic activities, to increase the business of their members, and to make "Great Britain a nation even more adjusted to the needs and preferences of traders than it was already" (97). The merchant class was able to construct its identity in many ways, and it effectively capitalized on the availability of the media—and not just by publishing society lists—to do so. In issue number 69 of *The Spectator* (1711), the essayist and politician Joseph

Addison argued eloquently and persuasively that mercantilism was patriotic and merchants the "most useful Members in a Commonwealth." Addison was concerned with emphasizing the naturalness of trade and grounded his position in the idea that the destiny of trade follows the destiny of man. Reasoning that Nature has distributed "her Blessings" throughout the world with the intention that the food grown in one country might be reunited with its "sauce" grown in another, Addison explains that merchants who bring to England goods from all corners of the globe serve a power that is higher than man or nation; they reunite things that go together, thus fulfilling Nature's design. The fact that this reunion takes place in England suggests that its wealth through trade is natural, too.

Addison suggests that this naturalization of foreign "things" goes hand-in-hand with global harmony as it reunites peoples as well as goods. In Addison's view, Nature in her personified form dispersed component goods like tea and sugar across the globe with "an Eye to this mutual Intercourse and Traffick among Mankind, that the Natives of the several Parts of the Globe might have a kind of Dependence upon one another, and be united together by their common Interest" (1711). The unity that trade produces brings people together in a harmony that they have not previously known, correcting the divisiveness of nationalistic pride and restoring a near-heavenly order. Addison rhapsodizes that, while at the *Royal Exchange* (a thriving marketplace in central London), "I am a *Dane*, *Swede*, or *Frenchman* at different times; or rather fancy my self like the old Philosopher, who upon being asked what Countryman he was, replied, That he was a Citizen of the World." The end result of trade then is that at the same time that it bolsters the English economy, it turns Englishmen into "Citizens of the World" without necessitating that they leave home, and, perhaps more significantly, it naturalizes the world's citizens and turns them into "Englishmen." Nature's design then is that diverse people and things be reunited through

trade in order to flourish in their combined usefulness. This idea of the recombinant environment, enabled by trade, is seen throughout the mid-to-late 1700s. In images like *Farm birds with a macaw and a tom-tit in a tree* and in the building of small-scale household orangeries and large-scale botanic gardens such as Kew (founded in 1759), we can see the actualization of the Addisonian idea of "Nature's Design"—the reunification of dispersed species. Seemingly, it was merchants who made it possible to reunite the world's flora and fauna—and the English—into a sort of prelapsarian paradise.

The visual representation of this recombinant—or unified—world was often a woman's body adorned with the collected objects of the globe. Addison's "Royal Exchange" makes this clear: "The single Dress of a Woman of Quality is often the Product of a hundred Climates. The Muff and the Fan come together from the different Ends of the Earth. The Scarf is sent from the Torrid Zone, and the Tippet from beneath the Pole. The Brocade Petticoat rises out of the Mines of *Peru*, and the Diamond Necklace out of the Bowels of *Indostan*" (1711). The figure of the woman as locus of trade and accumulation is one that Addison had been imagining and articulating for several years, but his image is not limited to manufactured import goods. In 1709 Addison wrote an essay in his *Tattler* newspaper making it clear that, in his view, women are natural animals. He writes that women are "the most consummate Work of [Nature]" and that as such "every Part of Nature [should] furnish out its Share towards the Embellishment of [women]" (qtd. in Brown *Ends* 116). He imagines a world in which animals like lynx and peacocks will recognize that the nature of women is closely akin to their own nature, and through this recognition that they "shall pay Contributions to her" clothing (116). In Addison's image, women are more closely allied with natural things than they are with men and what men have made—society. Reflecting on Addison's image of the "Natural" woman, Brown writes, "Of course, the collaboration

represented here is only a rationalized version of imperialist expansionism" (116); if all of the products of trade could be laid at the feet of aristocratic women, so too could its violent components.

Instead of glorifying trade and commerce as Addison often does, Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* comments on the violence and avariciousness associated with commodity fetishism—a destructive result of our quest to amass goods and wealth. Brown argues that Pope's poem depicts the "locus classicus" of the theme of woman as generatrix of exotic consumerism (*Ends* 112-113). This can be seen in the toilet scene of *The Rape of the Lock*: here "the artifice through which Belinda's beauty is either created or awakened is attributed to the products of trade and defined through a catalogue of commodities for female consumption" (113). When Belinda begins dressing, arranging her hair, and putting on make-up, in Pope's words, she uses "The various Off'rings of the World" to do so (Canto I). As "awful Beauty puts on all its Arms," it does so by dipping into the world's stores which are strewn across the dressing table. In Canto I, Pope describes Belinda's vanity:

> This Casket *India*'s glowing Gems unlocks,
> And all *Arabia* breathes from yonder Box.
> The Tortoise here and Elephant unite,
> Transform'd to *Combs*, the speckled and the white.
> Here Files of Pins extend their shining Rows,
> Puffs, Powders, Patches, Bibles, Billet-doux.

The poem goes on to point out that Belinda's shell is just a glamour created by piling on luxury after luxury. Just as this poem naturalizes exotics through imagery that makes them seem *de rigueur*, Brown also argues that *The Rape of the Lock* naturalizes exotics through diction. She sees that Pope uses "euphonius language," for example the carefully alliterated

words in the last quoted line above, to "naturalize the representation of accumulation, providing a verbal justification for the ruthless heaping up of objects that have lost their distinctiveness from one another in their numerousness" (*Rereading* 12). In addition to showing his Belinda surrounded by exotic luxury items, even Pope's language inures his readers to commodity fetishism.

The Rape of the Lock then responds to Addison's interpretation of merchants as "useful Members…[knitting] Mankind together in a mutual intercourse of good Offices," but it does not reiterate that view; instead Pope's poem reveals the empty consequence of greed and commodification. The implicit criticism in the toilet scene is that Belinda herself is *unnatural* because her virgin beauty is obscured by a gause of natural "things." Her dress, her hair, her face, and her smell are all hidden or "adorned" in some manner by imports, all of which were, in their own natural states, something else entirely, but were, as Appadurai puts it, "metamorphosed into commodities" (just as women of a marriageable age were metamorphosed into commodities). As she makes herself up, Belinda "rises in her Charms" (Pope Canto I). By adding rouge to her lips and cheeks she, "Sees by Degrees a purer Blush arise,/And keener Lightnings quicken in her Eyes" (Canto I). Pope responds to the "Romantick Animal" that Addison imagines in the *Tattler* by enlivening her, fictionalizing her, naming her Belinda, and then showing what Addison belives to be "natural" to be just the opposite. Yet, while the trope of the unnatural woman who disguises herself with the intent to trick the viewer into a false belief regarding her interior or exterior qualities is mobilized in *The Rape of the Lock*, Pope doesn't offer an alternative to a sytem that he clearly believes is destructive. Conversely, when this trope enters into Edgeworth's *Belinda*, the novel rejects it as dishonest and offers favorable examples of honest women. I argue that the ultimate goal of this refiguring is to disentangle the falsity that women's vanity is to blame

for commercialism, to show that women can engage with exotic "things" in productive ways, and to highlight the utility of alternative modes of exchange.

Un-"fair" trade: the commodification of women in *Belinda*

The commodification of naturally-occurring things—especially women—has been the focus of much scholarly research for the past half century. Many of these inquiries have sought to employ Marxist labor theory as an explanation for this exploitation; however, as Gayle Rubin notes in her touchstone essay, "The Traffic in Women," "to explain women's usefulness to capitalism is one thing. To argue that this usefulness explains the genesis of the oppression of women is quite another" (163): obviously, the oppression of women predates capitalism. Building on the work of Levi-Strauss, Rubin theorizes that women are commodified by men and that as commodities they are a "conduit to a relationship rather than a partner to it" (174). In essence, she argues that women are traded by men to further masculine agendas and can therefore never be true partners in their relationships with men (fathers, uncles, brothers, husbands, etc.). It follows then that, "the relations of [the social] system are such that women are in no position to realize the benefits of their own circulation. As long as the relations specify that men exchange women, it is men who are the beneficiaries of the product of such exchanges—social organization" (174). Eighteenth-century patriarchal culture obscured such commodification by suggesting that vain women actually commodified themselves through their obsession with fashionable, foreign goods. In *Ends of Empire*, critic Laura Brown seeks to "demystify" the process by which women came to be associated with foreign trade and exotic goods—and were later blamed for gross consumerism and colonialism. Brown's work on *The Rape of the Lock* illustrates Rubin's point that, although women might be blamed for the ills of society, they and their movements within most social structures are subject to the patriarchy and thus can only further the

partriarchy's agenda. Brown finds that this situation was true for eighteenth-century English women. In her essay "Capitalizing on Women," she argues that eighteenth-century aesthetic tastes necessitated that literature use only indirect references to historical events and ideologies. Because history is not directly addressed as such, image and allegory are used in its stead to allow for exploration of social concerns. Brown's research is able to show that "the figure of the woman is the discursive means to the connection of imperialism and aesthetic theory" (*Ends* 104); since she stands as the representative image of larger events, problems, and debates, she "plays a central role in the constitution of…mercantile capitalist ideology" (3). Edgeworth's *Belinda* responds to this enduring tendency by aligning commodity fetishism with corporeal illness and juxtaposing commercialism and the concerns of England's economic system with alternative modes of trade.

Although Edgeworth's Belinda is Pope's character's namesake, in *Belinda* it is really Lady Delacour who most resembles the commercial behavior of Pope's heroine. Edgeworth figures Lady Delacour as an allegorical character who embodies the late-eighteenth-century trope of the sterotypical female consumer and then simultaneously deconstructs and reforms her throughout the novel. This deconstruction is a demystification of the female consumer, as it reveals her training, motivations, and behaviors to be the result of her place in the patriarchy. Lady Delacour admits that her sole goal as a young woman was to be a coquette, attract as many marriageable men as possible, and marry a rich husband. Once married, her early training led her to continue focusing on her place in society, not on nurturing a happy family. Her preoccupation with appearances is exemplified by her use of "paint" and constant references to her own and Belinda's blushes. Lady Delacour often focuses on Belinda's cheeks, which the narrative emphasizes are without rouge, to question Belinda's "naturalness" and honesty. Lady Delacour does this to avert attention from both her own

dishonest nature and her deteriorating appearance. Early in the novel, Belinda wonders why Lady Delacour is so secretive about her toilette when her "glaring" rouge and "obvious" pearl powder allow any observer to see that she is "painted" (Edgeworth 21). Later she discovers that Lady Delacour is trying to conceal her illness and paints herself thickly in an attempt to make the world believe that "nothing is the matter with" her (Edgeworth 265). Helena too notices her mother's heavy make up. When, in a conversation about the danger of believing that facial expressions reflect inner emotions, Lady Delacour challenges Helena by asking if she can tell by her face that she is dying, Helena answers no, but hesitates. Lady Delacour then exclaims, "You perceive some difference, for instance, between Miss Portman's colour and mine? Upon my word, you are a nice observer. Such nice observers are sometimes dangerous to have near one" (Edgeworth 289). The danger of being seen for what she is is particularly threatening to Lady Delacour who is convinced that, if he learns of her illness, her husband will abandon her or subject her to public ridicule. To divert attention from her sickness, Lady Delacour adorns herself in all sorts of clothing and accessories; she hopes that others will see her participation in consumer culture as proof of her continued affluence and happiness. In reality, though, Lady Delacour's spending is just one facet of a lifestyle that is antithetical to her nature.

By the end of the novel, Belinda manages to rehabilitate Lady Delacour from her lifestyle of excess: the very fact that the she is able to be rehabilitated means that she is not wastefully extravagant by nature. *Belinda* demystifies Lady Delacour's behavior in particular and the figure of the female consumer in general by revealing their geneses. It is clear to Belinda that Lady Delacour's concern with her appearance stems from her desire to be attractive to men. This is linked to her identity as a woman, as she was taught from a young age that success in life comes from marrying successfully, and that male love is inspired by a

woman's loveliness; however, soon after her marriage, Lady Delacour realizes that what she was taught was a lie, as she comes to believe that her husband married her for her money, not her self. Lady Delacour's current prodigality seems to be a result of this belief and her great unhappiness over it. Explaining her behavior to Belinda, she says, "I endeavoured to console myself for misery at home by gaiety abroad. Ambitious of pleasing universally, I became the worst of slaves – a slave to the world" (Edgeworth 41). Although she is aware of her motivations, she is defensive when justifying her spending to her husband and bitterly reminds him, "that an heiress, who [has] brought a hundred thousand pounds into his family, [has] some right to amuse herself" (Edgeworth 39). Lady Delacour's marital identity unites her self with her money in such a way that all of her actions prior to meeting Belinda involve spending, buying, and accumulating. This state is unnatural to her, and leads to reckless behavior involving her fortune, reputation, and body. It seems that, in order to keep her fortune, Lady Delacour believes she must convert it into consumables. As she narrates her program to Belinda, she admits to waging a verbal battle with her husband in which the word "economy" is used a weapon: "economy was a word which I had never heard of in my life till I married his lordship," she says, yet "upon second recollection, it was true I had heard of such a thing as national economy, and that it would be a very pretty, though rather hackneyed topic of declamation for a maiden speech in the House of Lords" (Edgeworth 39). By highlighting the difference between "economy" in the sense of domestic frugality and "economy" in the sense of a country's wealth and resources, especially in terms of its production of goods, Lady Delacour points to one of *Belinda's* central issues—the contradiction between domestic economy and national economy. She also demonstrates the confusion caused by the commercialization of the female (read "domestic") body. Lady Delacour symbolizes all aristocratic women who through their fortunes and spending help

the national economy yet are vilified for their excesses.

The way women, like exotic goods from colonial lands, are problematically commodified in the English marriage system is also highlighted by Clarence Hervey's use of Virginia St. Pierre. Belinda and Virginia share a common distress over their place as objects around which men and families transact relationships of affinity and money. Even before she is told what her true circumstances are, Virginia seems to understand her position in society. One night she falls asleep after a particularly distressing interview in which she learns she is intended to be Clarence Hervey's wife. The next morning she tells her keeper, Mrs. Ormond, that the dream "was all so confused, I can recollect only some parts of it. First, I remember that I thought I was not myself but the Virginia that we were reading of the other night; and I was somewhere in the Isle of France. I thought the place was something like the forest where my grandmother's cottage used to be, only there were high mountains and rocks, and cocoa-trees and plantains" (Edgeworth 387). From this dream, the reader easily realizes that one place stands for another, that the woman's body and the exotic colonial land are the same, and that men, the keeper and conqueror of both, commodify them for their own gain.

Belinda utilizes the juxtaposition of female characters—Belinda and Lady Delacour and Belinda and Virginia St. Pierre—to accentuate its commentary of ways of being, yet Belinda's character is not figured as an easily-reducible answer to what these other female characters represent. Belinda is not an allegory, she is not an "either/or," and although she may represent a type of person, she is neither a symbol nor a stereotype. Instead, Belinda is a character who represents a way of being and doing that, while surely idealized, unsettles categories. Like Lady Delacour, Belinda knows that her mind and her body are a unified "good" on the market, but Belinda has no fortune. Belinda's Aunt Stanhope has advertised

her through various social avenues and has made it clear that she is available for purchase through the English system of marriage. She becomes acutely aware of this after overhearing some young men unkindly discuss her situation at a party: "Belinda Portman, and her accomplishments, I'll swear, were as well advertised as Packwood's razor strops," one man quips (Edgeworth 25). In response to these words and her recognition of Lady Delacour's unhappiness, Belinda rejects the commercialization of her identity, most notably, by trying *not* to fall in love with the richest bachelor she meets, and instead trying, with Mr. Vincent, to make a match based on mutual respect and shared values. Belinda's refusal to put her body on the market recalls Laura Brown's claim that "Through commodification or through difference—women can disturb the coherence of mercantile capitalist ideology either way they come to it, in part because they are so essential to its self-representation" (*Ends* 21). Belinda knows that she is, as a fortuneless woman, a commodity without monetary value. By resisting a marriage with Clarence Hervey—one that she fears will be seen as a marriage for money—she attempts to resist her further commodification; and perhaps she too resists what she perceives as a commodification of Clarence himself. When presented with Mr. Vincent, a rich man who is not Clarence Hervey, Belinda briefly imagines that she can, with him, create a marriage out of mutual love and respect, but she soon realizes that not marrying Clarence because he has a huge fortune is just as misguided as marrying Mr. Vincent because he has a smaller fortune. Money it seems is inescapable where marriage is concerned.

Belinda's aversion to money is not restricted to her fears about marriage; throughout the novel she avoids the marketplace and nearly all interactions with money. This is notable since the novel begins with Belinda's Aunt Stanhope instructing her to spend what she has and to use credit. "Lady Delacour has an incomparable taste in dress," Aunt Stanhope

writes, "consult her, my dear, and do not, by an ill-judged economy, counteract my views – apropos, I have no objection to your being presented at court. You will, of course, have credit with all her ladyship's tradespeople, if you manage properly. To know how and when to lay out money is highly commendable, for in some situations, people judge of what one can afford by what one actually spends" (Edgeworth 9). Despite this advice, Belinda does not take financial advantage of her friendship with the Delacours; instead she is extremely thrifty. The one thing that Belinda nearly buys is a dress to wear to the Queen's birthnight ball, but she never orders or buys the dress. Rather than spend money on herself, in Chapter VI ("Ways and Means") Belinda learns that Lady Delacour needs two hundred pounds to pay for some horses that she has ordered so she lends her friend the money and decides neither to buy a new dress nor go to the ball (81). Later in Chapter XII ("The Macaw"), Lord Delacour attempts to reimburse Belinda for those two hundred pounds. When he does, he also gives Belinda a pocketbook containing money that is meant for his wife. Yet, instead of taking the proffered banknotes, Belinda puts the two hundred pounds into the pocketbook (touching both for only seconds) and gives both to Lady Delacour (154-156). Her hesitance to touch money in this scene is suggestive of the novel's wider presentation of spending as linked to prodigality and immorality. Nevertheless, Belinda does participate in exchanges in the novel—many of which facilitate the movement of goods through her social circle—but, for the most part, these exchanges do not transform goods into money and vice versa.

Through its obvious pairings of the right and wrong approaches to behavior and life, *Belinda* presents the reader with another way of thinking about women's relationships with "things." We meet Lady Delacour after she has been corrupted, when she is entrenched in spending, debauchery, and excess. Through Belinda, her moral opposite, we see alternative

ways of being and doing, and less destructive ways of engaging in commerce. Surely, Belinda's avoidance of the market is partly due to the small amount of money available to her, but, since her aunt encourages her to borrow, Belinda's total reluctance must be due to something else. Belinda knows that she is free to borrow from the Delacours, and that, if she marries well, her husband will pay her debts, yet she eschews credit. Belinda is "on the market" yet she stays out of it, and when she does facilitate commercial interactions or the circulation of goods, she ensures that these exchanges are not exploitative of people or "things." She never adorns herself with exotic "things," and in fact the exotics she interacts with remain in their whole, natural states—they aren't reduced to other forms.[2] It seems to me that this must be the text's answer to end-of-the-century stereotypes about women (and women of a certain social class in particular) and their participation in the market. *Belinda's* "domestic economy" is one in which women circulate "things" that they need through a feminized space and in which flora and fauna become a site of female community. This "domestic economy" works very differently than does the male-dominated national economy.

Fair Trade, or a Woman's Market

When the female characters in *Belinda* circulate goods, they are not engaging in the male-dominated world of commerce or trade; instead they use alternatives to circumvent that economic structure. My suggestion here is very different from other scholars' interpretations of economy and exchange in *Belinda.* Previously, Marilyn Butler has charted commodities through *Belinda's* plot to show that the exchange of goods in the novel follows a prescription that is related to hierarchy and social expectations (1997). Using the theories

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[2] As, for example, Pope's Belinda uses exotics: "The Tortoise here and Elephant unite,□ Transform'd to *Combs*, the speckled and the white" (*The Rape of the Lock*, Canto I)

of the sociologist Bourdieu, Butler argues that "[social] competence is conveyed or found wanting [in the novel *Belinda*], as in most societies, not only by dress and role playing but by the giving of gifts and the style of hospitality. A good gift ought to come as a surprise; it should not seem to have been exacted or be too costly; in the learned, sophisticated world Edgeworth describes, it will be unusual and preferably exotic" (490). While Butler's interpretation of the circulation of gifts in *Belinda* is useful as an application of Bourdieu's theories, it denies that *Belinda* focuses on what is, almost exclusively, a women's economy. In fact, Butler asserts that, "Edgeworth accepts the values of the world she describes and puts its economic base up front: taste matters, and the best shoppers win the race" (489). This reading of *Belinda* is completely at odds with mine, as Butler's thesis is predicated on the supposition that women engage in gifting in the same way that men do. Yet if we consider Rubin's observation that "marriage is the most primitive form of gift exchange" and acknowledge that, as commodities themselves, women cannot engage in the market as full agents, it should be clear that the forms of exchange used by women cannot be the same as those used by men (173).

It is only when women lose their feminine selves—become masculinized—that they can participate in a patriarchal and capitalist economy. Indeed, Lady Delacour is at her most prodigal when she is under the influence of Mrs. Harriet Freke, a woman who affects as many stereotypically-masculine mannerisms as possible. In describing Mrs. Freke's personality, Lady Delacour reports that she is "frank," has more "assurance than any man or woman" she knows, and speaks with "unbounded freedom" (Edgeworth 44). Mrs. Freke not only aligns her behavior with that of men, she often dresses as a man. And it is only due to Mrs. Freke's encouragement that Lady Delacour decides to enter into a duel with Mrs. Luttridge and dress in man's clothing while doing so. Recollecting how much power Mrs.

Freke once had over her, Lady Delacour implies that it was Mrs. Freke's masculine qualities that gave her that power: "I had prodigious deference for the masculine superiority…of Harriot's understanding," she recalls (53). While she is under Mrs. Freke's sway, Lady Delacour engages in an excess of consumerism that outpaces any of her other spending. Before she meets Belinda, Lady Delacour does exactly what the patriarchal economy desires: she enters the marriage market, becomes a commodity, moves from her father's home to her husband's, is a conduit for family relationships and inheritance, and then contributes to the male-dominated world of commerce by spending two fortunes. She is a perfect maquette of the market, but once she meets Belinda, the reader recognizes that the model she represents is friable. As Luce Irigaray argues in her book *This Sex Which is Not One*,

> [women are] supposed to keep commerce going by being an object of consumption or exchange. What seems difficult or even impossible to imagine is that there could be some other mode of exchange(s) that might not obey the same logic. Yet that is the condition for the emergence of something of woman's language and woman's pleasure. But it would have to happen "elsewhere," in some place other than that of women's integration and recapture within the economy of purely masculine desire. (158)

I will argue that Edgeworth creates that "elsewhere" in *Belinda* by providing space for alternative modes and meanings of exchange. Instead of integrating themselves into the market, as Lady Delacour does to the diminishment of her fortune and self, other female characters in *Belinda* are able to construct a productive and sustainable "economy" through the careful, feminized circulation of "things."

Women and exotic "things" are closely allied in *Belinda*, yet the text uses this alliance to undo the prevailing commodification of both. An exemplar of the way women and

exotics were converted into commodities and "advertised" in the eighteenth-century is provided by Tiepolo's painting *A Young Woman with a Macaw* (see fig. 4). In this painting an upper-class woman—perhaps a courtesan—in a state of near undress wears a gown that falls below her bosom to reveal her right breast. The background is plain and does not locate the viewer in space or time, yet the woman in the painting is adorned by images of Empire. The roses and ivy in her hair denote the pastoral life, the choker of large pearls at her throat calls to mind the wealth of the East Indies, and the macaw that leans forward into the frame signals wealth, exotic sexuality, and is a symbol for the Spanish colonies of the New World[3] (Boston College Department of Art History). Moreover, the composition of the image equates the exotic bird with the woman' sexuality: Tiepolo has balanced the image so that the bird simultaneously mirrors and reinforces the size and shape of the young woman's breast. Thus, the exotic bird is conflated with the woman's sexuality at the same time that it cocks its head suggestively toward her nipple in a predatory way. Looking directly at the viewer while the woman looks away, the macaw seems to imply that the woman's sexuality is located outside of herself.[4] There is a macaw in *Belinda,* but it functions in a much different way than the one in this painting. That macaw never adorns any woman, lives in the servants' quarters and is not even displayed in the public parts of the house, is not linked

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[3] Symbolically, macaws are connected with the Spanish colonies in the New World and stand for that locale in at least two paintings of Louis XVI's youngest sister Louise-Elizabeth (see figs. 6 and 7).

[4] In addition to reinforcing exotic sexuality through the visual association of birds and women, there may be other connections as well. The English language may reinforce the conflation of young women and birds. According to an entomological dictionary, the Middle English "bird" is a rare variant of "bridd," meaning "a young animal" or even "a young human being." "Bird" meant, originally, "nestling." By 1300 the word "bird" was sometimes used to refer to a "maiden or young girl," although this use is probably separate from the slang term "bird" that was used to refer to young women beginning around 1915 (Harper).

with commodity fetishism, and, as I will show, its use in the novel is ultimately positive since it helps to bring about the reconciliation of Lady Delacour and her Aunt Margaret. Thus *Belinda* shows that a certain type of exotic trade, in this case circulation that is located in a feminine sphere, can be productive to English society.

Subverting the stereotypes that can be observed in Tiepolo's painting, *Belinda* sets up a dichotomy between Lady Delacour's way of life and Belinda's and then proceeds to compare nearly every aspect of those two modes of living. Two imported luxuries in particular—the aloe and the aforementioned macaw—are contrasted to show moral and immoral modes of trade. Using the approach offered by Igor Kopytoff in his essay "The Cultural Biography of Things," we can examine the biography of both of these commodities (items "with a use value that also [have] an exchange value") to examine their origins, their metamorphoses into market goods, their monetary values, and their removal from the marketplace (64). Both the aloe and the macaw were taken from their natural environments, traded through the Spanish West Indies, and imported solely for their exotic nature. Aristocratic tastes, which favored the exotic at the time, forced their prices up so they would have had high exchange values when they entered the market, but, in most of those aristocratic homes, exotics became display objects and thus did not have high use values. This is the case with the aloe, which is part of Lady Delacour's story before Belinda enters into it, and which was fetishized and not "used" in any productive way. The macaw, perhaps symbolizing colony, is presented as an alternative mode to this wasteful type of "economy." Its movement in the novel illustrates a more positive form and function of exchange, and instead of being fetishized, it ultimately has a surprisingly-high use value. The goldfish too, which were likely imported from Asia or continental Europe, find a high use value in the novel and, although they did not originate in the West Indies, they play a part in the novel's

commentary on colony and global trade. Through the biographies of these flora and fauna, the reader witnesses destructive and productive modes of exchange.

The aloe is used in such a way that it exploits, impoverishes, and damages the lives of many people. The plant first enters the plot when, in Chapter IV, Lady Delacour tells Belinda about her competition with her social rival, Mrs. Luttridge. In order to woo society away from a dinner party that Mrs. Luttridge is throwing, Lady Delacour gets a flowering aloe from a gardener who, although he could make "about a hundred guineas" from exhibiting the plant himself, sells it to her via Mrs. Stanhope's maid for only fifty (Edgeworth 63). It is unclear what species of aloe Lady Delacour's plant is, but it is described as "a plant that blows but once in a hundred years" (63); thus the aloe is presented as a "century plant." Since the flowering of "century plants" was so rare, Lady Delacour tells Belinda that the opportunity to see one in bloom will seduce society to Lady Delacour's event and help her to triumph over Mrs. Luttridge. After the party, Lady Delacour basks in her short-lived glory and role as tastemaker, and the aloe itself is discarded. Once it has blossomed, the plant is worthless to her, and thus it is never restored to the plot. A modern reader could easily see *Belinda's* aloe as an allegory for colonial lands that are plundered for their "flowers" and then abandoned after their resources are spent.[5]

Lady Delacour's callous use of the aloe and its owner is contrasted with *Belinda's* refusal to reduce the blue macaw to its display or economic value. This is significant because blue macaws were very rare in the late 1800s, so they were worth enormous amounts of

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[5] A reading that acknowledges the late-eighteenth-century habit of representing women as flowers is also valid and illuminating (For a theory that supports that reading, see Sam George's *Botany, Sexuality, and Women's Writing* (2007)).

money.[6] It is also significant because Lady Delacour, who certainly enjoys her position as society tastemaker, cannot find any use for the macaw, so wants to get rid of it. To her, the macaw's rarity and display value are secondary to its use value. Lady Delacour doesn't like this macaw since it is noisy and keeps her up and thus has no utility that she can see (Edgeworth 141). Her maid Marriott though, who is the true owner of the macaw since she received it as a gift, derives a high use value from the pet she enjoys.[7] When Lady Delacour tells Marriott to get rid of the macaw, its use value still supersedes its exchange value. Strangely, Marriott's inability to recognize the exchange value of her macaw persists even while she is in a store that specializes in selling macaws. Marriott and Belinda are at the bird seller's shop on another errand when they overhear the bird seller tell Aunt Margaret, "Red macaws, my lady, I have in abundance; but unfortunately, a blue macaw I really have not at present; nor have I been able to get one, though I have inquired amongst all the bird-fanciers in town; and I went to the auction at Haydon square on purpose, but could not get one" (162). In light of her blue macaw's rarity and high economic value, it would seem that this

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[6] Although a blue macaw might have been worth an enormous amount of money when *Belinda* was written, Lady Delacour notes that the macaw only "cost [Marriott] four guineas" (Ch. XII, "The Macaw"). This is hard to believe given the rarity of blue macaws in general even today and their rarity in England at the time. In fact, my survey of newspapers from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries turned up very few advertisements for macaws, although parrots and other birds from the Americas were comparatively common, so the bird seller's difficulty in finding a blue macaw likely reflects a common shortage (see fig. 5).

[7] Interestingly, Marriott conflates herself with her macaw and takes Lady Delacour's dislike of the macaw personally. She exclaims, "Odious! O dear, my lady! to call my poor macaw odious! – I didn't expect it would ever have come to this – I am sure I don't deserve it – I'm sure I don't deserve that my lady should have taken such a dislike to me" (Chapter XI, "Difficulties"). Her feelings may be a reflection of the fact that many pet owners tend to feel so strongly about their pet that any slight to it is felt as a slight to themselves. Nevertheless, this conflation may hint at the association of the exotic with women's bodies. If so, it seems that this association was, by the end of the long-eighteenth century, not exclusively confined to aristocratic women, but had made its way into the lower classes as well.

would be a perfect time for Marriott to tell the bird seller that she has a blue macaw available, yet neither she nor Belinda mention this fact to him. Marriott, who did not buy the macaw, may never have conceived of it as a commodity with monetary value; ultimately, instead of selling it, she gives the macaw away, and the bird remains outside of the commercial realm, or, to use Irigaray's term, "elsewhere."

The "elsewhere" that Belinda helps to construct for the macaw and its exchange defies commerce in favor of "woman's pleasure." When Belinda discovers that Lady Delacour's Aunt Margaret has been looking for a blue macaw, she easily transfers its ownership from Marriott to Aunt Margaret. This transfer serves two ends: it brings about Lady Delacour's reconciliation with an aunt from whom she has been estranged, and it restores the macaw to usefulness. When Belinda gives the macaw to Aunt Margaret, she is "in hopes that these terrible family quarrels might be made up" (163), but the gift itself is not intended as an exotic luxury. Aunt Margaret's tastes do not tend toward fashionable displays or commodity fetishism, instead she is an educator, and the reader assumes, she will use the macaw as an exotic teaching specimen. Perhaps it is true, as Kopytoff notes, that "gifts are given in order to evoke an obligation to give back a gift, which in turn will evoke a similar obligation—a never-ending chain of gifts and obligations" (69), yet Belinda doesn't hope to gain anything for herself by this gift. The way that the macaw is passed between the women in the Delacour household and throughout the Delacour family certainly suggests an alternative use for exotic items and for exchange—a woman's system of trade that exists outside of the masculine world of national economy. It is as if none of the women actually own the macaw or have a right to it that extends beyond its enjoyment or utility; when one person no longer finds a thing useful or satisfying, it is passed on to another who can.

Other exotic "things" pass through characters' hands in this novel, and that string of object exchanges reinforces the female economy illustrated through the macaw. Just before Belinda announces that she intends to send the blue macaw as a gift to Aunt Margaret, Helena tells Belinda she intends to send her mother a present of goldfish (Edgeworth 162). These are the same goldfish that Marilyn Butler considers to be the gift that initiates the exchange that Lady Delacour fulfills by taking Helena to see the mechanical bird. To Butler, these gift exchanges exemplify the way in which an aristocratic woman would teach her daughter about taste and tasteful gifting, but I would suggest that they are much more about utility. As I have discussed, feminist theory denies the ability of women (who are gifts themselves) to participate in patriarchal capitalism unless they are acting as agents of the patriarchy when they do so. Instead, the gift exchanges that occur within the novel's feminized space seem to ensure that certain "things"—and Helena herself—stay within what is in this case a matriarchal realm. When Helena was a child, she was not of use to her mother's social ambitions, so she was sent to boarding school. After becoming acquainted with Mrs. Percival, Helena becomes a useful member of their households and spends most of her holidays with that family. As a result of Belinda's efforts, Lady Delacour begins to be restored to harmonious domesticity, and Helena can, as her daughter, be useful to her domestic identity. The goldfish are Helena's way of acknowledging her wish to be useful to her mother and to give her something useful as well: Helena knows that the macaw was pretty to look at, but that it was too loud. Hoping to give her mother something else that is more to her taste, Helena sends her a bowl of goldfish—a prize that she won in an educational contest. Through their biography, the goldfish give us a glimpse of how the macaw will eventually be used in the Percival household. In fact, the goldfish seem to

function as an aquatic correlate to the macaw—a thing that might have a high exchange value[8], but whose educational value is perceived as primary.

The goldfish in *Belinda* start out as a teaching specimen (see fig. 8): they are kept in a glass globe at the Percivals' house and the children are encouraged to observe their habits (Edgeworth 98-99). One night when Dr. X is having dinner at the Percivals', he notices the children intently studying the goldfish. Edgeworth writes that "The children assailed him with questions about the ears, eyes, and fins of fishes. One of the little boys flipped the glass globe and observed that the fish immediately came to the surface of the water, and seemed to hear the noise very quickly; but his brother doubted whether the fish heard the noise, and remarked that they might be disturbed by seeing or feeling the motion of the water when the glass was struck" (99). The doctor then teaches the children some things he knows about goldfish. When Lady Anne sponsors an academic contest among the children, the prize is the goldfish and the winner is Helena—that is how she comes to have the right to give the Percivals' goldfish away (172). One thing the children don't know though is what goldfish eat, and even after Helena has gone to stay at her mother's, the Percival children are mystified about what to feed them. Lady Anne is a devotee of Rousseau's progressive educational theories, so encourages the children to experiment until they eventually discover that their fish likes lemna, a type of duckweed, and send a letter containing this information to Helena (235). The goldfish are not valued for their ability to signify their owners' taste; instead of being valued for their surface beauty, they bring the satisfaction of discovery to their owners.

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8 Macaws and goldfish originated on opposite sides of the globe, but both were extremely rare and expensive in the late 1700s. Originally bred in China, goldfish were introduced to Europe in the early 1600s and made their way to England sometime during the reign of James I (1566-1625) (Bleher 4-5). Eventually goldfish arrived in France when, in 1750, they were presented to Madame Pompadour at the court of Louis XV.

When Helena gives the goldfish to her mother, Lady Delacour is able to discover previously-unknown aspects of her daughter's personality; this leads to her acknowledging her love for her daughter and her desire to again have Helena live with her. As a gift, the goldfish are certainly "as pretty as any birds in the world" (173) and Lady Delacour appreciates them much more than she does the macaw. Helena sends them to her mother the day after meeting Belinda at the bird fanciers, and then comes herself to Grosvenor Square for dinner. Lady Delacour places a high value on the goldfish, but not because, as with the aloe, she sees them as something she can use to outdo Mrs. Luttridge or because of their monetary value; at this point, the goldfish have a value that is outside of the patriarchal system of capital—their worth comes from their matriarchal identity as a gift from a daughter to a mother. The first night that Lady Delacour has them in her house, she uses the goldfish as a decoration that is reminiscent of her use of the aloe plant—as a centerpiece on her table during a society dinner. However, unlike the aloe, which she gained through dishonest means and threw out as soon as its bloom was gone, the goldfish work as a symbol that emphasizes Lady Delacour's transformation into another rarity—"la femme comme il y en a peu." They allow Clarence Hervey to see Lady Delacour in a new way—as a woman with a happy domestic life—and, as a result, Edgeworth tells us that Hervey pays Lady Delacour "respectful attention" throughout dinner (176). This, coupled with her reunion with Helena, restores Lady Delacour's spirits, alters her self-concept, and brings her great pleasure.

As I have noted, most of the exchanges in the novel have monetary implications inasmuch as the things that are exchanged are hugely valuable, but the exchanges aren't done for monetary reasons. Instead of being bought and sold, the valuable objects in the novel are gifted, but interpreting these gifts as part of a system that serves the hegemony of patriarchy

is misleading. The novel focuses on the exchange of items that are useful—not ones that are desired for their exotic natures. The macaw is useful to Marriott because she enjoys it, and when it is no longer useful because it has become an annoyance, she gives it to someone else who can enjoy it. Margaret Delacour, the reader assumes, will use the macaw as a teaching specimen, not as an object of exploitation or display. The goldfish too start out in the Percival household as pets that the children can learn from, and clearly contribute to their scientific educations. Moreover, the goldfish is the medium through which to Helena and her mother's broken relationship is mended. Instead of presenting the goldfish and the macaw as commodities to be bought and sold, the novel figures them as objects linked to knowledge, reconciliation and reciprocity.

Conclusion: "elsewhere," or that "other" market

I would like to suggest that the way the macaw and goldfish are traded is the type of commerce that Edgeworth favors. It is different from the type of trade advocated by Addison in *The Spectator* and by Adam Smith because it disallows the ideology that the entire world lies within the realm of commodification; moreover, it figures the commodification of nature as "unnatural." Instead of agreeing that the British system of trade adheres to some sort of natural law and is positioned at an advanced place on a continuum from "savagery to civilization," *Belinda* offers a different meaning and use for trade. The novel implicates itself in a century-long discourse about capitalism and alterity[9] by repeatedly highlighting commercial and non-commercial exchanges. It is likely that these exchanges are grounded in Edgeworth's own readings about indigenous Americans. Instead of presenting a now-traditional economic world that naturalizes exotic species and approves of commercial

[9] Here I am considering alterity in its broadest sense, and thus am thinking about gender, sexual identity, ethnicity, and race.

exchange and exploitation, Edgeworth seems to endorse a different use for natural goods. The novel's intimate concern with the West Indies reveals Edgeworth's knowledge of the area. In fact, Edgeworth had extensive knowledge of current travel accounts including those of the New World (Butler 481-482). Specifically, *Belinda* appears to be informed by the 1667 work of Jean Baptiste du Tertre. His *Histoire générale des Antilles habitées par les François* first articulated the concept that would later develop into the idea of the "Noble Savage" and which was so foundational to the work of Rousseau. Du Tertre claims that the Carib Indians "have among them no kind of commerce, they sell or buy nothing, giving each other quite liberally all the things with which they can relieve their compatriots without inconveniencing themselves too much" (Hulme 131). According to du Tertre, the Caribs traded generously but not to amass wealth or personal fame; they traded for the advantage of all, and when they could no longer use something, the object was exchanged with someone who could use it. Du Tertre's most famous passage relates the Caribs' inability to understand an exchange as a permanent sale:

> [We] French are quicker and more adroit than they are, they are easily enough duped; they never sell a bed in the evening, because since these good people see the need they have for one at the present moment, they would not give their beds for anything at all; but in the morning they give them cheaply without thinking that once the evening comes they would be in the same position as the preceding evening; in addition, they do not fail to return at the end of the day & bring back what has been given them in exchange, saying quite simply that they cannot sleep on the ground… (Hulme 133)

When the Caribs exchange goods between themselves, du Tertre writes, the end result is not exploitative of individuals or groups of people, but benefits everyone. This system is

anything but capitalistic. Since goods are used when they are needed, the Carib system as described values goods for their utility not their exoticism. This presentation of the Caribs' attitude toward exchange and utility is certainly problematic as it presents the Caribs as stereotypical "noble savages" whose innate morality structures all that they do. Yet in the novel, Belinda's innate morality structures all that *she* does. Therefore, Edgeworth's novel presents a view of English trade that finds it inferior to an idealized—and likely imagined—view of non-European trade. In the exchange system of du Tertre's otherized Caribs, just as in that presented in *Belinda*, no "thing" can become a signifier of excess wealth, thus reducing overall consumerism. And consumerism—especially that which is exploitative or leads to the commodification of people and nature—is refused in this novel.

In closing, I would like to suggest that Edgeworth's *Belinda* employs exotic goods for very different political reasons than have been previously seen. Certainly, to the reader they do function as signifiers of wealth and emblems of the exotic, but that may be due to their treatment in works other than in *Belinda.* By 1801 exotics were thoroughly ingrained into English society, so Edgeworth did not need to work to naturalize them; instead, she comes to exotics as they are, accepts that they are here to stay, and then builds a plot that examines the exchange system that commodifies them. A feminine system of trade that exists in a space of "woman's language and woman's pleasure" (Irigaray 158) and that is outside of patriarchal capitalism is naturalized in *Belinda.* Edgeworth's heroine eschews commercial exchange—remember that Belinda rarely even touches money—in favor of the feminized circulation of useful "things." While the eighteenth-century English economy was designed to exploit citizen-consumers and colonies for the benefit of England, in *Belinda,* Edgeworth seems to argue that trade should be regulated by a regard for others and a desire to enjoy the utility of the things being circulated. In other words, *Belinda* argues that if trade truly is, as

Addison asserted, "Nature's design," it should function as a system that benefits all of Nature.

Appendix: Figures

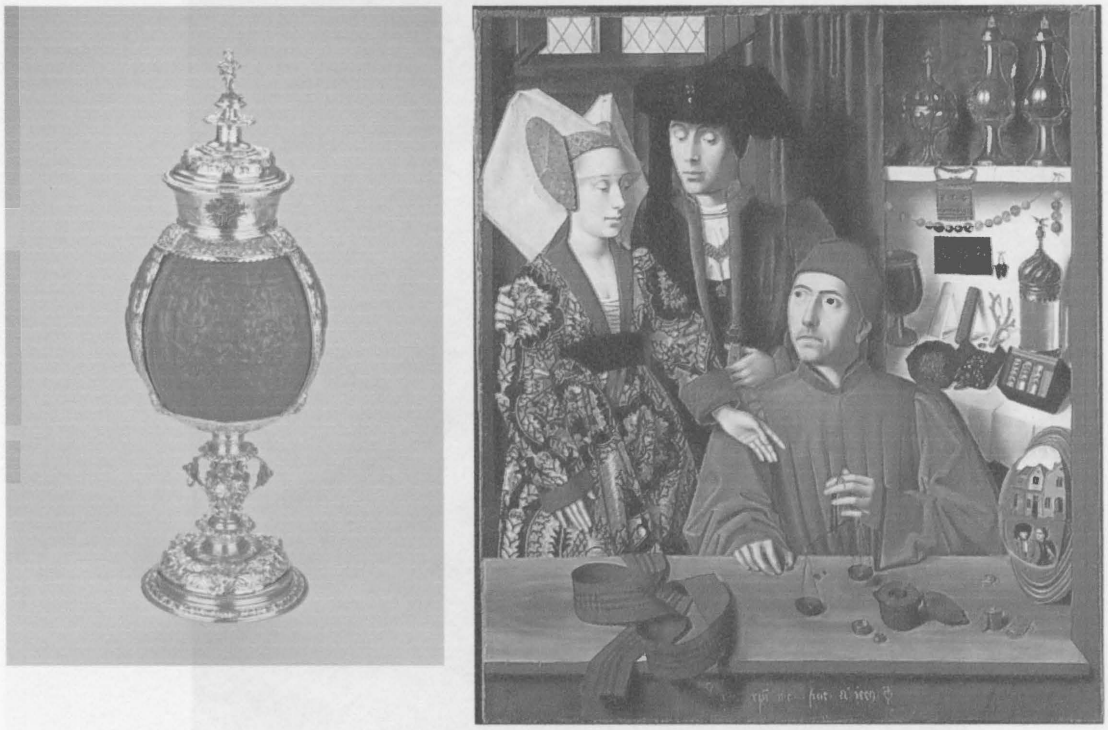


Figure 1. Left: Coconut Cup with Scenes from the Life of David. 1577/78. Gift of Mrs. Stanley Keith, 1951.72a-b (The Art Institute of Chicago).

Right: On the lower shelf, to the right of the merchant's head, is a standing cup with a carved coconut bowl. It is presented along with red coral, a string of what appear to be agate beads, perhaps two arrowheads set in gold, a rock crystal vessel, and, in the leather case, two pieces of obsidian. *A Goldsmith in his Shop, Possibly Saint Eligius,* by Petrus Christus, 1449. Oil on panel. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Robert Lehman Collection, 1975.1.110. (The Walters Art Museum)

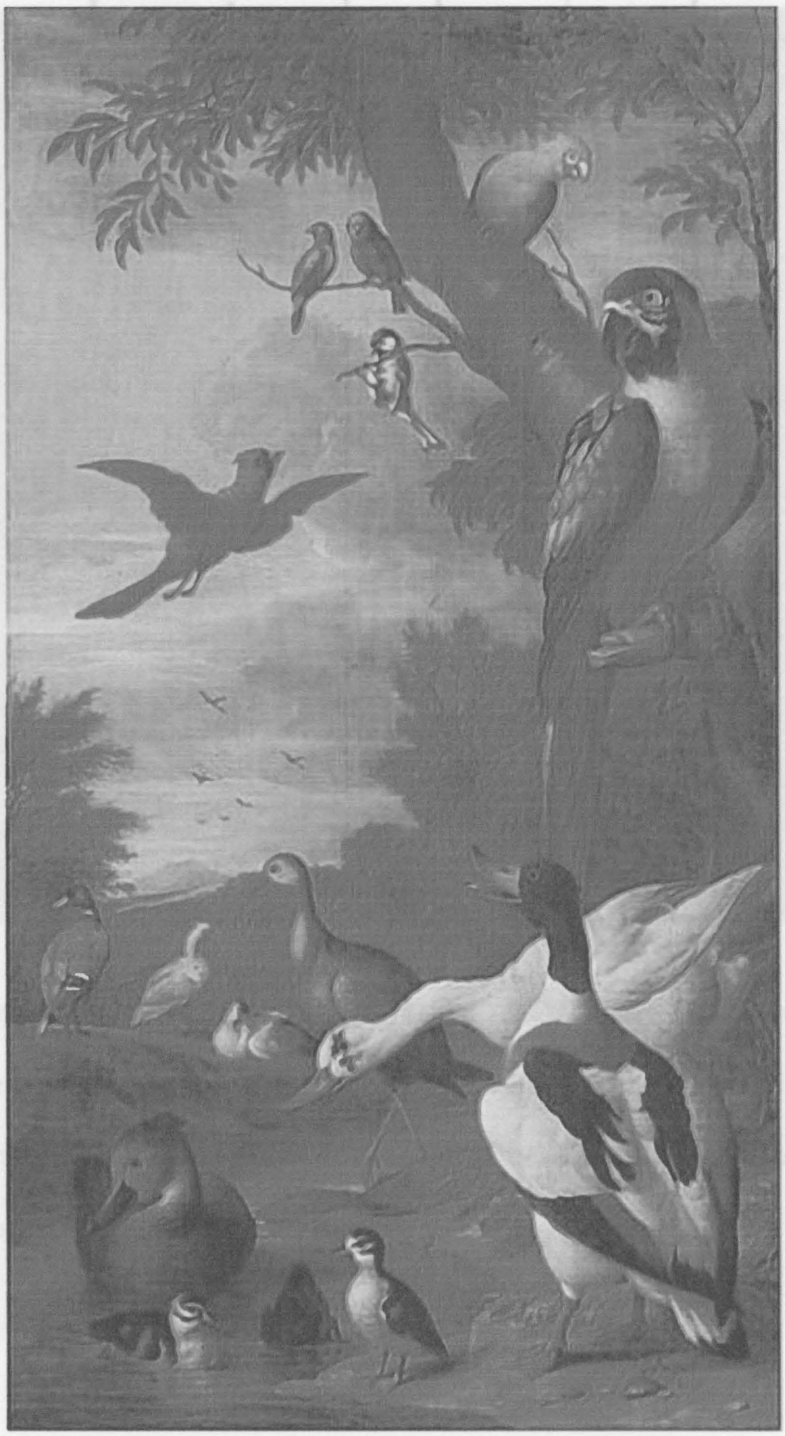
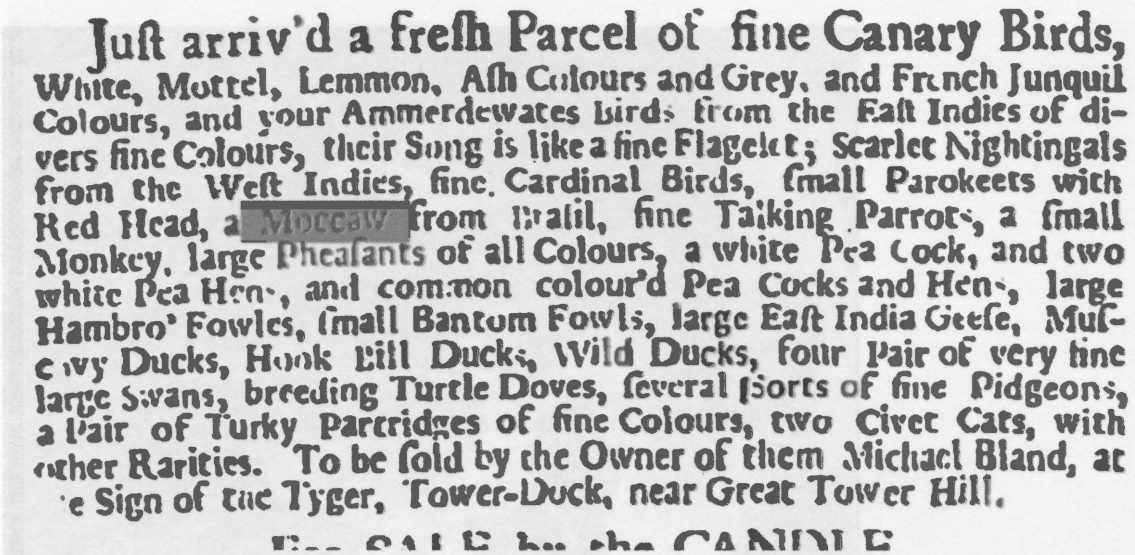


Figure 2. *Farm Birds with a Macaw and a Tom-Tit in a Tree* by Jacob Bogdani (b. 1655, d. 1724), British. Date: 1st quarter of 18th cen. In this painting, exotic American species including a blue macaw, are presented along with native English poultry. Scenes like this attempt to appropriate exotic natural items into the British natural scheme.

Figure 3. *Feeding the Macaw* by Charles Baugniet (1814-1886), Belgian. Unknown date. This picture illustrates the ideology of "nature" as it pertained to British domestic life in the long eighteenth century. In addition, we can observe the naturalization of exotic trade goods throughout the domestic environment.

Figure 4. *A Young Woman with a Macaw* by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo (1696-1770). Painted around 1760. This painting, probably done for Elizabeth Petrovna, Empress of Russia, shows a half-dressed woman holding a macaw. The cameo depicts a Caesar, possibly Augustus (www.ashmoleon.org).



Juſt arriv'd a freſh Parcel of fine Canary Birds, White, Mottel, Lemmon, Aſh Colours and Grey, and French Junquil Colours, and your Ammerdewates Birds from the Eaſt Indies of divers fine Colours, their Song is like a fine Flageolet; Scarlet Nightingals from the Weſt Indies, fine Cardinal Birds, ſmall Parokeets with Red Head, a Moccaw from Brazil, fine Talking Parrots, a ſmall Monkey, large Pheaſants of all Colours, a white Pea Cock, and two white Pea Hens, and common colour'd Pea Cocks and Hens, large Hambro' Fowles, ſmall Bantom Fowls, large Eaſt India Geeſe, Muſcovy Ducks, Hook Bill Ducks, Wild Ducks, four Pair of very fine large Swans, breeding Turtle Doves, ſeveral ſorts of fine Pidgeons, a Pair of Turky Partridges of fine Colours, two Civet Cats, with other Rarities. To be ſold by the Owner of them Michael Bland, at the Sign of the Tyger, Tower-Dock, near Great Tower Hill.

TO BE SALE by the CANINE

Figure 5. "Moccaw" advertisement. A 1724 advertisement for a sale of exotic birds from the New World. Source: *Daily Post* (London, England), Wednesday, October 7, 1724; Issue 1570.

Figure 6. *Portrait of Madame Louise-Elizabeth of France, Infante d'Espagne, Duchesse de Parme with her two-year-old son* by the French woman artist Marie Adélaïde Labille-Guiard. Completed in 1787. In the image, the blue macaw "reminds the viewer of the Spanish empire's control of South and Latin America. Louise-Elizabeth and her son are scheduled to rule that empire" (Boston College Department of Art History).

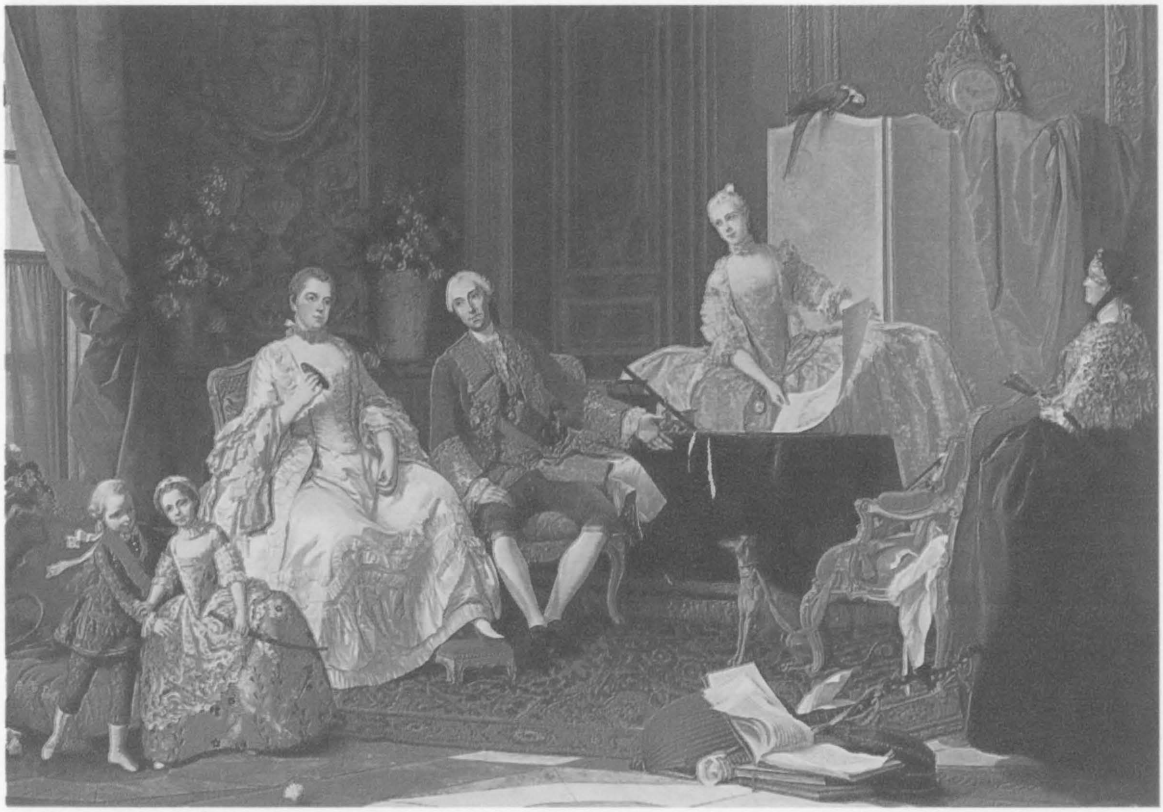


Figure 7. *The family of Philip of Parma* by Guiseppe Baldrighi (1723-1803). Painted circa 1755. The boy in the bottom left is Louis XV's grandson, Ferdinand, the eventual Duke of Parma. The little girl who is taking his sword and thrusting his hand away from it is Marie-Louise, who will marry the Spanish King Carlos IV and become Queen Maria Louisa (Delours). The blue macaw perched on the golden screen recalls the family's place in the Spanish royal family.

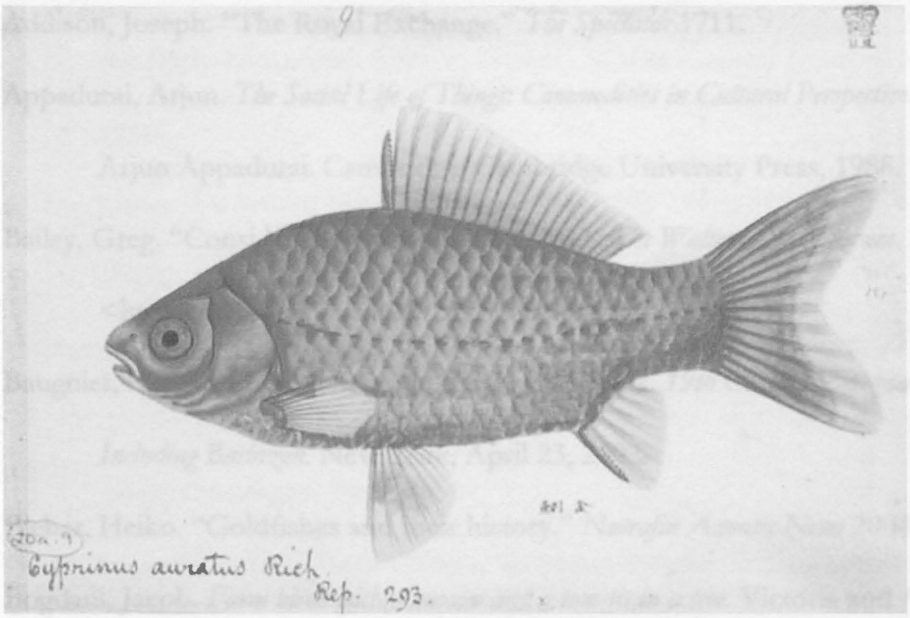


Figure 8. "Cyprinus auratus", goldfish, Plate 20a. watercolour by Thomas Hardwicke (1755-1835) from his *Drawings of soft-rayed fishes of India and China.* In 1758, one year before the *Systema Naturae* appeared in English, Linnaeus became familiar enough with goldfish to classify them as *Cyprinus auratus* (Bristol Aquarists' Society). This is the species that may have been given by Helena to Lady Delacour.

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